

## INTRODUCTION

The idea of harmony and discord, of consensus and argument is perhaps particularly fitting for a discussion of sport. Sport is at the same time a site of harmony and conflict. In its very nature it has a form of conflict enshrined in harmony. While sport is about obvious conflict, between a player, a team, a country, it is impossible to participate in any sport without accepting, by one's very presence, the idea of an overarching authority or consensus. Sport, as much as conflict and competition is about consensus,; consensus in rules, authority and ways of playing. One cannot play football without at least implicitly accepting the constructed rules of the game; you cannot begin to openly play the game with the hand and expect to get away with it. Thus football, as with other sports, has within it a form of harmony and conflict. How one is allowed to behave in football can be linked to certain discourses. Discourses of values, of how the body should be used, of what role football plays in society, of power, order, administration and punishment.

When such important ideas and concepts are at play, consensus is often challenged, either overtly or in more subtle ways. And that is what this paper aims to represent; a cultural activity, which is at once one of consensus and conflict, of harmony and division. In the next 20minutes I hope to propose some of my new thoughts on some historical research I have done: a new construction or story if you will. It relates to how language was used in football in the Netherlands between 1910 and 1920 and about how the football became a contested site in Dutch society. This narrative construction is certainly open for debate and, given the short nature of the talk, I hope to leave you with some questions which you may find your own answers to.

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## 1. LANGUAGE, HARMONY AND DISCORD

That a language of what was acceptable and not was connected to football will perhaps not come as much of a surprise to us today. For any of you who have read, watched or listened to matches, there are certain ideas and words connected to fair and foul play, good and bad play, which seem to indicate an idea of what is privileged in the game. And the same can be said of the game in the Netherlands in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In media reports of the time there is an apparent harmony of what was considered good and bad for the footballer, which attributes were praised and derided. The following examples from across the period, from different newspapers and indicate that specific words were linked to positive and negative concepts.

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**Certain words like ‘vuur’, ‘hardwerk’, ‘snelheid’ and ‘samenspel’ were all positive. Ruwheid, forsche spel, weingin sportief elementen, slapheid, futloosheid, were all negative. I have given some examples for you to look at.**

**TAKE A DRINK AND BREATHE HERE!**

While I’ve only provided a few examples, each of these terms was used across the media field between 1910 and 1920 to refer to football players and their actions. They seem to construct a commonly accepted representation of what was good and bad. It was noted in all the newspapers that to work hard was good, to be listless was bad and would have bad results. Speed and power were good, but misusing power in the form of roughness or force was unacceptable. We can think whether this still rings true today?

It seems that the use of similar words suggest harmony within the game of football about what was accepted, what was not accepted. This set of words was part of what I consider a 'discourse of values' within the football field; a set of ideas, practices, concepts, language and crucially sporting rules which was linked to either a positive image or negative one – one which was intimately connected to those in power within the game setting out how they wanted the game to function and how they wanted those who played it to behave. They formed an 'ideal' sportsman who should be copied and reproduced. They were part of a wider 'discourse of football' which also included representations of good order, administration, charity and education – emphasising the positive nature of football and footballers in society.

But this 'discourse of values' in football was formed by a language which was itself subjective and interpreted differently. There may have been a harmony about the specific terms which were good and bad, what actually constituted such terms was a site for discord, confusion and subjective perception. This is indicted by reports on the same game between Ajax Amsterdam and Sparta Rotterdam in 1918. Although initially praising some of the play of Ajax the Rotterdam based catholic newspaper, de Maasbode, noted in its report:

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Referee Willing was in charge, and this was fortunate because without his firm hand the play of the Amsterdammers would have been less pleasant. People know what we think of the Amsterdammer's system. The "hacking", the pushing and the throwing which these "amateurs" make use of, is so condemnable that even the most neutral spectator said to us yesterday "I am happy that Sparta have won, because of the unpleasant play of the Amsterdammers".

de Maasbode went on to criticise scandalous fouls and dishonest tricks.

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However, Rotterdam based NRC, although noting a few infractions had a different tone to its report, summing up the game as follows:

While some complained about play that was too forceful, we would like to impart our opinion, that we do not share in this general view. There happened here and there, and more from Ajax's side, some isolated incidents, that would have been better not taking place, but the game as a whole was certainly not too wild or too rough.

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In the Amsterdam press no mention was made of any concept of forceful play noting rather in the Algemeen Handelsblad that the:

'The match yesterday in Rotterdam was beautiful and exciting. It cannot be said that Ajax deserved to loose: a draw would be a better result in this match of equally completely equivalent teams.'

In the popular Amsterdam daily De Courant they felt Ajax deserved to win. They sympathised with the Sparta defence not for rough play but because their teammates had been listless, although they did note some rough play here and there.

What these excerpts suggest to me is that while the actual language used may have been regular, how it linked to the actions of individuals in the discourse was subjective and changeable.

There was space between language, action and meaning. This space within the 'discourse of values' in football and its subjective understanding could be a site for conflict and a negotiation of power, of what was acceptable or not. The space between the concept of 'forceful play', what this actually was and how it was represented, indicates that there is some uncertainty and discord about how actions were perceived and permitted.

It allows those without explicit positions of authority to manoeuvre their own space within the confusion of the discourse, to push the boundaries, to try and be more forceful or strong. But it also allows those with authority, the media, the rule makers, to reframe discourses able to cope with such changes; if language can be used dexterously to refer to meaning, then discourses, narratives and other concepts are sometimes able to subtly shift to minor changes while appearing to remain stable. In the cases above the discourse some attributes are good and bad remains stable, but how this relates to action is anything but.

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## **2. STRUCTURAL DISHARMONY/POLITICAL DISCORD – HISTORICAL EXAMPLES – SEE BITESIZED**

So the 'discourse of football' could be linked to constructed 'discourses of values', which, while inconsistent, were an important way to reproduce and reinforce certain ideas. These 'discourses' were also active in wider society and were often related to what kind of citizen was desired within society. Such discourses in football were related directly to how people could use their body. The discourse outlined above was intimately connected to masculinity, of how a good gentleman should behave. Women were deliberately ignored in this discourse, but examples of some women finding spaces within the discourses can be found. In regulations, in spatial constructs and crucially in the media, a discourse of values about the body and how you must use it was created, reinforced and reproduced. Thus football and its discourses could be an important way to disseminate and reproduce ideas within society, and to influence other discourses.

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As this excerpt from a school football committee of 1910 shows:

The committee considers that football training for school pupils, under the expert leadership of a teacher, a leader or a self chosen instructor, is of immense worth in the physical formation and the character building of the male youth, and the committee is of the view that this game, more than any other, which benefits physical development, should be spread.

But exactly who would have the opportunity to do this was another source of disharmony, and the reason I have now referred to discourses rather than a discourse. There was not just one discourse of football but many different ones, related, overlapping, contradictory and competing in certain parts of Dutch society.

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The examples I have given so far all come from what I consider the dominant discourse of football, connected to the Nederlandsche Voetballbond, the NVB, the organisation in charge of today's Dutch football. It was established in 1889 and was the first to develop a system of regional leagues and clubs, often established by the sons of well-to-do businessmen, and was backed by politicians and wealthy businessmen. They were the first organisation to attempt to promote the game on a national level.

In competition to the, NVB, rival organisations were established, including folk-clubs, Catholic clubs and later protestant groups. Each of these groups had a different 'discourse of values' about how things should be done, and thus a different 'discourse of football' should operate. Most of the rival groups initially treated football very sceptically; as a corruptor of morals, a waste of time, or a distraction from more worth struggles. Initially socialist newspaper Het Volk did not report on any sport at all, indicating that sport was disregarded or regarded negatively by orthodox socialist politicians. Competition was especially antagonistic.

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While other newspapers began reporting on football in the 1900s, Het Volk waited until 1912 to do this. So called 'folk-clubs' operated which, while not necessarily socialist in nature, had different values to what they perceived as the 'elite' NVB. They formed a rival association in Amsterdam in 1904. Socialist sporting organisations emerged in the 1920s

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Around 1900 catholic clubs emerged, and after 1915 some preachers in the south began to established a wider organisation to try and play football within a catholic framework although this was not always welcomed. In 1918 the first protestant clubs emerged and the first organisation in 1929. Initially orthodox protestant preachers and politicians were vehemently against the practice of sport. In particular the fact that games were played on a Sunday was a central problem.

In 1912 a failed attempt was made by an ARP member in the Rotterdam Gementeraad to ban Sunday games. Time, and control over who did things when, was an important part of these 'discourses of football'.

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Space was an issue too. Separate organisations had separate clubs, with separate grounds. Mixing of the teams from different organisations was problematic- again demonstrating a lack of consensus. The main NVB became increasingly concerned at the growing popularity of these rival organisations and their spaces of play. There were attempts to work with the roman catholic organisation, provided that the NVB authority was recognised over the national game.

When plans for a new football ground in Rotterdam were mooted in 1912 some politicians felt that it would be too much of a distraction for workers in the area. When plans for the great Nederlandsche Sportpark were debated there was more disharmony. Het Volk reported that senior protestant politicians had voted in favour of the building of the stadium, despite at the same time being against the playing of sport on a Sunday, which would be the main purpose of a stadium. For the socialist authors this example was another demonstration of how protestant politicians said one thing and did another. This was another demonstration of discord and discontinuity within a group, suggesting competing discourses.



But I think this also shows is that a dominant discourse of football began to emerge – the NVB organised game became the most popular in the Netherlands. In catholic and socialist presses, this form became the most reported upon, despite the rival variants. In this way the NVB league came to form a cultural consensus. By 1918 sport reporting across the media field was dominated by the NVB league and over time this would become the only organisation in the Netherlands, bringing new harmonies, conflicts and discords into being.

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### 3. OUTRO

To return to the idea of harmony and discord. I have tried to demonstrate that football in the Netherlands at this time was a site of both, often at the same time. That there was a very real discord at the start of the century between those who thought football was a positive thing and those who thought it would have a negative impact on workers and the young; those that needed guidance. At this time multiple discourses of football were constructed, each connected to the discourses of values certain groups reproduced in society and to control over the body.

But throughout the 1910-1920 period I believe a dominant discourse of football emerged and it was one connected to the NVB. One of the key aspects of this discourse was to reinforce, reproduce and promote the idea that football itself was useful and good for society. In this a consensus seemed to be agreed upon across the various groups, although always with exceptions. The appearance of rival organisation with different discourses, while indicating disharmony, suggests a wider success and harmony of this aspect of the dominant discourse. Why it was this particular discourse which became dominant is something which raises other questions.

But it does appear that a form of consensus about the role of football in society was emerging. This belief in the educative, instructional and disciplinary aspects of football is one reason why in 1920 numerous different football organisations vying for control over different parts of Dutch society existed – from this harmony certainly came conflict.

I have also suggested that within discourses, which often seem to promote an idea of harmony, there is always discord. This is because the link between language and meaning cannot be fixed. This inconsistent and changeable construction allows space for movement or change and for dominant power to be challenged or adapted. The discourses of football are not separable, sealed entities but always in relation to others

and I believe this is why research into sport can be useful for wider reflections on society.

The title of this talk was searching for discord, and as someone who considers himself a 'postist' historian this was one of my implicit aims and it directed my own constructed narrative. I wanted to hint that I was doing something with the fragments of the past. That I went looking for discord framed this research, if I had looked for harmony it would be a different story, and indeed a different storyteller. As with all historians, this story, this fiction to use loaded terms, is my own and related to the present. It is about power, authority, and my own discord with these concepts. I think history is only of use when it helps us discuss the present, to frame questions and push certain boundaries. To think about how we construct power and how I have done it. To think about how language is used in sport. In particular how sport can help create, reinforce and produce images and language. And perhaps most importantly who this is done for and by.